

God's masterpiece

Part 1

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[00:00:01] The Assembly is God's masterpiece.

It was conceived in purpose, in eternity, before the worlds were made.

In order that it might be brought about, it involved the coming into this world of the Son himself, taking up manhood.

It involved his laying down that life of responsibility that he took, and coming out of death as a man, ascended back into the presence of God in heaven.

It involved the descent of the Holy Spirit, that we read in Acts 2, the beginning, the time of Pentecost, descended and formed there, [00:01:02] what we elsewhere refer to as the body of Christ.

The head having taken his place in heaven, the spirit descends to form the body on earth.

At the coming of the Lord, the rapture, as it is referred to, which simply means the grasping away, we which are alive and remain on earth will be changed, conformed to his image.

The dead in Christ shall rise, and they, together with us, will enter with the Lord into the Father's house.

The vessel, the assembly, the body, will be complete.

[00:02:02] The work of God as to it, having completed that work which was purposed in eternity.

I deliberately didn't read the first verses of Revelation 21, because those verses refer to what this vessel, the assembly, will be eternally, after time has run its course.

The verses that I read use descriptive and symbolic language to describe this glorious vessel as it will be during the thousand years reign of Christ over this earth.

We read in the first chapter of Ephesians that that same vessel, and let me say again, [00:03:07] that

vessel is composed of every believer from the day of Pentecost until the rapture.

Every believer.

Not one will be missing, and there won't be anyone there who shouldn't be there, because it will be completely of God.

Nothing of man will be there.

I mean by that, nothing that is the product of man's mind.

You and I will be there, thank God for it. That vessel is called at the end of Ephesians chapter 1, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.

A very difficult statement to explain its meaning. [00:04:05] It seems completely incomprehensible to us that there can be anything that then can be equated or referred to as the complement of the person who is there the head of the body, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God the Son.

He will have a companion, one who can share in that place of glory.

You remember his words in John chapter 17, the glory that thou hast given me, that's the glory that his father gave him as a man. We might explain it simply as the glory of redemption I have given them.

And so we see that company at the end of that chapter as the complement, the companion, [00:05:05] the vessel that God will use to fill the universe with the glory of Christ.

I believe that is what that verse is saying. The assembly or the church, whichever you prefer, will be that vessel that God will use to fill the universe with the glory of Christ.

We read at the end again of chapter 3 that that same vessel will be that which will bring glory to God until the ages of the ages, which of course is eternity.

But it's the same vessel, a vessel competent to exist in the glory of God and be for the glory of God, for his pleasure and for the satisfaction of the heart of Christ, [00:06:08] which leads us on to the last verse I read in Ephesians. Christ loved the assembly and gave himself for it.

There was an objective in view and it was that moment when it will be presented unto himself, now notice the next words of scripture, a glorious church.

There won't be any spot or there won't be any wrinkle. There will be nothing missing from that glorious vessel and there will be nothing there that shouldn't be there. It will be in a state that is absolutely competent to bear and display the glory of God [00:07:02] throughout a thousand years as far as this world is concerned.

Now the reason why I have raised this with you dear brethren is for our encouragement because these things are put in the scriptures for our present encouragement.

And whenever the truth of God concerning what he is doing and what he is about to do is brought home to us and by the power of the spirit we believe it, these truths carry with them always a responsibility.

And it is with regard to the responsibility that all our problems are connected.

But the truth of God is not given to us to make problems. [00:08:05] It's given to us that we might be established in regard to what God has been pleased to reveal concerning himself and what he is doing and what the Lord Jesus is doing and what he will be in the world to come and what the spirit of God is doing on earth at the present time. So I've read to you the description of this vessel which there is referred to as a holy city.

Briefly we'll try and explain what these terms mean. But it's put there, the vision was given to John in order that you and I today might see clearly what God is moving on to, what his objective is.

[00:09:06] And the reason being is that God wants you and I to have the same objective in view as he has in view.

You know if we looked round about, and I don't encourage anybody to do it, but if we did it, we would see, thank God, in the world today millions of believers.

There's probably more believers in the world today than there has ever been in the world's history. Don't let us forget that, brethren. We live in a day of small things in the UK. But I honestly believe there are more believers alive in the world today than there have ever been in the history of the world. But sadly they're all divided. [00:10:01] That is not of God.

That is of man.

That is of man.

But that in no way will thwart what God is going to do and turn him away from the purpose that is before him. And neither should it have that effect on you and I either.

In a practical way, and I want to just go down some of these features of this holy city and take account of what the Spirit of God says about these features with a view to them having a moral effect practically in each one of our hearts and lives.

Now the reason why I do this, and I can prove it and give authority for it from Scripture and I'll just say this now. [00:11:01] The word in verse 11, having the glory of God and her light.

The word should be her shining.

Her shining.

And I believe I am right in saying that the only other occasion when that word is used in the New Testament is Paul's word to the Philippians in chapter 2, I think it's verse 15.

Among whom ye shine as lights in this world.

Same word.

So we see clearly that the shining that will come out through the holy city in character, in essence, in substance is exactly the same that Paul said was shining out from that little Philippian company 2,000 years ago.

[00:12:06] Same thing, same word, not different. God would not work to one end before him that will be seen in glory and work to a different end in the hearts and lives of his saints today.

So what God will display in glory, morally and as far as we are able, practically should shine from us as individuals and as companies in the world today.

And that is what Paul said to the Philippians. They were shining in the world and it was exactly the same shining forth as will be seen from this holy city in the thousand years reign of Christ. Therefore, I conclude that the rest of the things that he says about this [00:13:01] marvellous vessel, this glorious vessel, can likewise be taken up in a practical way. I'm not going to go through all the details, I cannot. This is not the first time that one of the angels has said to John, come hither and I will show thee. The previous time, I think it's chapter 7, it was the false church. Satan's imitation of what God is producing.

And to see that, John was carted away into the wilderness. But when it was a matter of John coming hither and being shown the bride, the Lamb's wife, the true work of God having arrived at its final state, [00:14:01] John is carted up into a high mountain. That's the first thing. What does that mean to you and I? To be in the good and in the enjoyment of heavenly things.

We need to know a little bit practically about being spiritually elevated out of the world in which we live. Because this world is completely incapable of taking in anything of God apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in sovereign grace. So he's taken away into a high mountain. He's taken me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain and showed me that holy city.

Cross out the words if you read the authorised great city, shouldn't be there. [00:15:02] Great is connected with what man does. Holy is connected with what God is and consequently what he does.

And so the second thing concerning this city is it's completely compatible with what God is in his nature. Holy. This city which speaks of administration in scripture that means by which God disperses his blessing to men that city in the world to come will be characterised by holiness.

If it wasn't so, it could never have been said that it has the glory of God. [00:16:01] The two things must go together.

What does that say to you and I today brethren? About ourselves individually or our gatherings collectively?

Dare we say that in their composition and in the way that we act in them and the way that we carry them on dare we say that they are compatible to what God is in his nature?

Are our gatherings not only characterised by love?

Thank God that that is the case so often and how glad we are to see it. But the first feature that God takes account of almost of this city is not love.

It's holiness. It's holiness. [00:17:02] So here again we are faced with a practical responsibility in regard to the response found in our hearts and in our lives and in our assemblies to what God reveals about what he is about to do. I mentioned that there was a shining out from this and it has the blessing of men in view on the one hand but we could put a lot of other things in that as well. It has the glory of Christ in view. Because this light will shine down on the very scene and that's where it will start as far as this earth is concerned into that very city where he was crucified Isn't it a marvellous concept of the grace of the love of God [00:18:05] that that very spot in this material world although of course at this point of time it will have been cleansed by judgement but nonetheless that very spot and in the midst of that little nation drawn back to that geographical place that very spot where Christ was crucified is the place, the first place on earth where the shining of the holy city will be perceived and enjoyed and its blessing worked out.

What a wonderful thing that is. He who bore the crown of thorn shall be seen to be wearing the diadems of glory [00:19:04] and that will be brought about by the fact that he will be in the midst of this glorious heavenly vessel.

Now God would have that consideration affect us practically today.

Christ should be in the midst. Christ should be exalted in the midst of his saints and all that he is in response to what he suffered on the cross should be there cherished and responded to and form part of that outshining of the grace of God in the world today.

It had a great war.

God always protects what is precious to him and will ever keep out what would damage it [00:20:04] and keep in because if anything got out something would be lacking. So it's enclosed in a great war.

There were 12 gates and you can't miss the repetition of the number 12 in the mathematics of this chapter. That would tell us clearly that God has in view the administration of his blessing on a cleansed earth from himself, from Christ, through the assembly down to that little nation of Israel and reaching out to every nation in the world, the nations that are saved. That's the way the channel will flow. That is why that the 12 gates have got the names [00:21:03] of the tribes of the children of Israel. The gates of the city in Old Testament were the place where the city was administered and this blessing is going out through the gates, through the shining, via the 12 tribes to the saved nations of the earth.

Its outlook was in every direction.

There's no corner of the earth that's going to miss it. North, East, South and West. There was the perfect outflowing by the number 3 which always represents God in the scriptures. There is an outflowing, so to speak, from God himself to every corner of the earth and it will be done through this city. Now again, verse 14 refers to the wall of that city which had foundations, 12 foundations. [00:22:04] What's the good of a wall if it hasn't got the ability to stand up? And this wall is built on 12 foundations and the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb are written thereon. It's not quite Israel this time. We've now moved on to New Testament terms and we've got the 12 apostles of the Lamb.

Ephesians 2 verse 20 refers to the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. And this wall that keeps out what shouldn't get in and keeps in what needs to be retained is built up upon a foundation and that foundation is the teachings of the New Testament apostles and prophets.

[00:23:03] So it's a wall that is reared up on the doctrine of God that came out from the apostles of the Lord Jesus in the power of the Spirit of God and established not only the church but the truth of God which includes the revelation of God as we know it today. Sadly, one has to acknowledge that amongst Christians many walls have been erected with a view to trying to do what God will ultimately do perfectly. And I believe that that is right and proper. But what is absolutely essential is that those walls that we may put up today to protect what we value are based upon the teachings of the apostles [00:24:04] and not upon the thoughts and ideas of men.

So again you can see the wall so again you can see that what God will display perfectly in the world to come has a reflection upon you and I today in the way that we act in our gatherings together which locally are the local representation of the body of Christ in whatever locality we may live in. Doesn't make a difference because the size of our gathering does not in any way alter the truth of God. It may make it more difficult to maintain, granted but it doesn't alter the truth. We live in a world that because it's impossible [00:25:01] to maintain these things today we modify them and we give them up or we introduce an idea to try and give an appearance of keeping them. You can write an awful lot of things into that but I'm not going into that today. But whatever walls that we erect round our gatherings to protect as far as we are able the truth of God and I say again we have to do it but let us make sure that they are based upon the teachings of the New Testament apostles and prophets.

Otherwise they're not real walls and they could do more harm than we may think they do good and they may let out what God considers to be vital and precious.

The only way to maintain that yes I'll use the word separation [00:26:02] is a separation that is based upon the apostles' doctrine.

The angel that talked with John had a reed, a divine measurement not man's measurement it was a reed that had measurements on it that were in accord with the mind of God and he measured the city with it and it was 12,000 furlongs which for your information is 1,375 miles.

It's astonishing isn't it? Do you ever realise that scripture says this building, this city is bigger than the United Kingdom and it's not a square, it's a cube.

[00:27:01] Everywhere the measurement was uniform everything was equal wasn't lopsided it wasn't top heavy it wasn't deficient in its base everywhere was a perfect uniformity.

Why? Because it was completely of God.

Man doesn't build like that he can't build like that. Bear in mind that this is figurative language it's not actual language I don't think for one moment it's figurative but it's meant to convey something to us and here is a great no I shouldn't use that word should I? a holy city whose proportions we would consider are very large but they are uniform [00:28:03] because they are of God.

Can we say that of what you and I are building? Of course we can't use these measurements but in our building locally or wherever we are building in seeking to promote the things of God is there an

equality a uniformity a measure that is according to God and a divine standard.

And again you come across the multiple of the word twelve and the next verse again refers to the measure of the wall 144 cubits 144 cubits now I cannot for the life of me explain why a thing on the one hand can be 1375 miles long and the next verse says that it's 144 cubits [00:29:03] and I'm not trying to because it's figurative language but the cubit is the measure of a man I think it's from here to here about 18 inches and it's used in the scriptures to describe that measurement which in Old Testament days was a measurement that was compatible and known of men and used of men but it not only says that that when he measured this it was not only according to the measure of a man it's also according to the measure of angels I'm not suggesting that angels use cubits they don't need that angels are the greatest beings [00:30:02] in the creation of God but what is the measure of an angel that can be compared equally to the measure of a man well the psalmist tells us that angels great in strength they do the will of God in other words they are tremendously wonderful beings but their one objective in life is to do the will of God and man at the outset was put in the garden of Eden to do the same thing but he fell but that doesn't alter the fact that the measure of a man is the same as the measure of an angel and that one measure is obedience the thing that characterizes this city [00:31:03] and those that inhabited it will be doing the will of God and that is why God can dwell there and again brethren we have to turn it back on ourselves is our main objective when we gather together or whatever we do is it to do explicitly what is the will of God without the interference of my will or somebody else's will in order that we might be characterized by being to quote the scripture not only hearers of the word but doers of the word as well in obedience that was the measure of that city the building over the wall was of Jasper [00:32:02] this is not the first time we've had this there isn't time to go into this but if you look up elsewhere in scriptures you will probably come to the conclusion that it describes that glory of God that he can communicate to men that men can not only see but have part of now I'll just have to leave with you to prove that out and look it up in the scriptures we haven't got time the building of the wall of Jasper the city was pure gold like unto clear glass I don't think it's possible that men today to obtain absolutely pure gold there's always impurities in it and that's why it's gold if you got rid of all the impurities in gold it would be clear [00:33:02] this city had no impurities its composition was completely of God according to what God is in his nature and according to God's righteousness and holiness and as a consequently it was crystal clear not just opaque like that glass over there which lets a little light through but you can't see through it it was crystal clear there wasn't anything there that was being covered up everything could be seen for what it is and that it was completely conformed to he who put it there is that true of our assemblies? are they crystal clear? or are they opaque? do you know beloved brethren [00:34:01] we may not have realised it before but this is one of the most practical chapters in the word of God if you read it in the way that I'm trying to explain it you must agree with me that if this is what God is working to it must be what I should be working to today in the assembly pure gold like unduclear glass punished with all manner of precious stones now I wish I knew something about this list of twelve precious stones but I don't and I don't understand it to use the language of others here is the perfect harmony of various hues of colour another has said that pure beauty is the perfect harmony of parts or colours [00:35:01] and I believe here you have a perfect spectrum of colours that if you join them all together you'd finish up with pure light most of you know that if you get light and shine it through a spectrum shine it through a prism sorry the light that goes through will split up into the various colours of the spectrum that's the reverse idea here are the various hues of the beauty of Christ shining out from the foundations of this city and surely it's the foundations that the earth will take account of that they will see when they look up from earth to the city what will they see? [00:36:01] pure gold? clear as crystal? the glory of God? yes but shining out from its base will be a perfect representation of the all various beauties of Christ I believe that's what these various stones speak of wouldn't it be a wonderful thing when that blessed man will

thus be perceived by men on earth I know it was said in Mark's gospel that he couldn't be hid that was true there was that which of himself was seen but in this scene this city and let us remind ourselves you and I compose this city it's a building of persons [00:37:01] but persons who have been conformed to the image of Christ and as a consequence are able to display to a wandering universe the beauties and the glories of that blessed man who is in the midst of this scene the twelve gates were twelve pearls that just isn't possible isn't it you can't find a pearl on earth that's big enough to use as a garden gate it's descriptive language a very large pearl and what do pearls speak of in scripture there are two things in the scripture that I understand are the product of suffering the other is pearl that which produces a pearl is in a muscle [00:38:01] is the introduction of something that irritates the little animal and to get over that irritation it covers it with a beautiful hue a pearl it's what Christ did on the cross wasn't he he took that which was so dreadful in the sight of God and he dealt with it in such a way that afterwards it shone with a hue that had a unique and precious value in his sight and that is the reason he gave himself for it that merchantman that man of discernment when he found one pearl of great value not price he didn't just sell all that he had he did that he laid aside his glory he laid aside every claim [00:39:03] to earthly glory but he not only did that he gave himself that he might have that pearl you and I for himself so the thing that will be seen from the twelve gates of this city are what the assembly is to the heart of Christ is that true of our local assemblies are we a display of what the assembly is to the heart of Christ I must move on the time is just about gone there was no temple there the reason is because the whole edifice was in effect of temple character they didn't have a special building [00:40:01] that represented the presence of God in this city because the whole city was of temple character and by the word that's the word naos which means the inner shrine not the outward buildings the very inner shrine of the temple the very presence of God this holy city was of that character and because God was there all earthly lights even though they may be in the heavens are dispensed with there was no night there there was no need of it because God and the Lamb were there and the gates were never closed they were guarded by angelic forces and nothing was allowed in and they are listed for us in the last verse which includes everything anything that defileth [00:41:02] another translation changes that to that which is common things that are common are of men there is absolutely nothing of men that will ever enter into that city there will be no abomination there abominations are those things like idols that take the place that alone should be given to God so God will be held in the affections and in the minds absolutely by those who form this city and nothing that makes a lie everything will be according to the truth that came by Jesus Christ isn't it a marvellous thing to realise [00:42:01] that this is what God is moving onward to and let us make no mistakes God will achieve it and when this vessel is taken out of earth and placed into heaven alongside of his son the work of God will be complete we shall be conformed to his image and this vessel will be that which God will use eternally for his own glory and for the satisfaction of the heart of Christ because let us remind ourselves in John's writing it's called the bride the bride and she's that eternally we've considered her in her wife character but she will eternally be to the heart of Christ his bride and we can do no better than quote the words of Isaiah he shall see of the travail of his soul [00:43:01] and shall be satisfied and beloved brethren so with you and I to God's glory sing the rest of that hymn from verse 9 called by that secret name of undisclosed delight blessed answer to reproach and shame graven on the stone of white God and the Lamb shall there the light and temple be and radiant hosts forever share the unveiled mystery so we'll sing from verse 9 to the end of hymn number 79